

## Plymouth Soup Run Report for Third Quarter: July-September 2024

### July-September in numbers

- 8,991 meals served, average 98 per night; 684 per week; 2% lower than 2023.
- 124 sleeping bags given out, average 9 per week.
- 117 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team, average 9 per week.

### September in numbers (July and August are covered in previous monthly reports)

- 2,835 meals served, average 95 per night; total meals served year to date: 25,012, average 91 per night.
- 40 sleeping bags, 13 blankets and 6 roll mats given out.
- 37 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.

### Themes and quotes

- Over the quarter, weather extremes impacted on teams and clients alike, from *"everyone was given bottled water in addition to the normal bags"* on one night, to *"a bitterly cold but beautiful moonlit evening"* or *"torrential rain and gale force winds ... everyone was absolutely soaked through"* on others. On the latter night, *"we were still amazed at how many people [76] were waiting at the stops for us to arrive ... the hardships of homelessness hit home"*. We were often asked to help people by replacing their wet clothing and sleeping bags.
- Sometimes, changed circumstances called for a nimble response, e.g. when the demonstrations took place in Plymouth on 5th August. Special arrangements we made to ensure that everyone waiting at the Soup Run stops was fed, and reassurance was given to some vulnerable clients affected by the unrest.
- Managing the run environment to ensure the wellbeing of volunteers and clients is a priority. This involves defusing tension, reminding people that we do not serve anyone carrying alcohol, and giving time to people in distress, as well as those who are known to struggle when the atmosphere becomes heightened: *"there were three of the team just listening and talking to people"*. When tensions turn into aggression, support has been sought from the police, and on two occasions, teams activated agreed withdrawal procedures.
- People's concerns were diverse: risks of domestic violence, system failure in responding to complex needs and neurodivergence, fear of losing accommodation: *"[name] was worried sick about being evicted in two weeks"*, theft or vandalising of possessions, challenging behaviour in shared accommodation, and bereavement. Many Soup Run volunteers and clients attended the memorial service for a person of whom we were all very fond.
- As ever, health concerns were very evident, in some cases drug-related: *"he had taken five times the amount of prescription drugs"*, *"[name] had taken a lot of spice. I have never seen him in such a bad way"*, *"nasal naloxone was administered at Mayflower Street and an ambulance called"*. Drug awareness and naloxone training for volunteers as provided twice recently by Harbour, has been invaluable in such situations.
- We are always concerned to understand the circumstances of new clients to determine their needs, sometimes for obvious reasons: *"the new people included one with a toddler in a buggy"*, others less obvious: *"we met a daughter and father who are street homeless"*. We often meet people who haven't eaten for one or two days, and sadly, the assessment by paramedics attending one person who had collapsed was *"that it was probably due to a lack of food and the ambulance staff kindly took [name] home."*
- Our Saturday morning rough sleeper sessions at Shekinah in collaboration with Path and Plymouth City Council (PCC) and with Rough Sleeper Initiative funding have continued with steady attendance and the occasional spike in numbers - to 35 recently. Over the quarter, five podiatry clinics offered by 'Forgotten Feet' volunteers, were invariably well received: *"I feel as though I have new feet!"*

### Resources and networking

- We are very well served by our subscription to FareShare South West, and food is donated by local shops, food businesses, supermarkets, individuals and teams. Details of teams and donors are given on our social media posts. All teams strive to provide a good meal, and the occasional novelty is really appreciated, e.g. a visiting burger van, a meal cooked by the Royal Navy or *"sausage and chips which people were delighted with"*.
- Planning is a constant challenge; numbers over the quarter ranged from 55 *"it was eerily quiet"* to 139 *"there were people everywhere waiting patiently"*. Good information sharing helps, plus recognition that when other services are not available, e.g. Bank Holidays and Sundays, demand will be high. Nevertheless, one team *"had to break open the 'in case of emergency' food"* and teams topped up supplies during the run on four occasions.
- A Household Support Fund grant from the UK Government via the Department for Work and Pensions and PCC helped 51, mostly single person, households from July to September, and 102 over its 6-month duration.
- Teams came from 10 churches, 17 businesses or workplace groups, and 8 community or philanthropic groups. Volunteers included school and college students, former service users, and grateful beneficiaries of the response to a civil emergency who were keen to repay the help that they had received.
- We continue to enjoy rich partnerships with the Plymouth Alliance members, notably Path and Shekinah, and are happy to host colleagues from StreetVet, Trevi, Citizens Advice and Shelter.
- Volunteers met as the Plymouth Soup Run Development Group; representatives attended various meetings: Plymouth Mental Health Collective, World Suicide Prevention Day, Changing Futures, Plymouth Food Aid Network, Rough Sleeper Operational Group, and various other meetings on rough sleepers and safeguarding.